



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Shutdown of Independent Printing Press in Kyrgyzstan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 03, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On February 22, electrical power to Kyrgyzstan's only independent printing house, operated by the Media Support Center Foundation, was cut off, effectively shutting it down. Fortunately, the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek was able to provide the printing press with two generators to keep the printing press operating at 50% capacity. Despite government assurances that power would soon be restored, as of March 2 this has not occurred.

Serving over 60 local and regional newspapers, both independent and pro-government, this printing facility has operated with the participation of the Government of Kyrgyzstan. The printing press is funded by the governments of the United States, Netherlands, and Norway. Operation of the printing press had been an excellent example of Kyrgyzstan's willingness to promote its OSCE commitments to media freedom.

On February 25, the Government of Kyrgyzstan refused to allow Radio Liberty programs to be broadcast in some regions.

These actions, which came only days before the parliamentary elections, now cast doubts on the Government's commitment to media freedom and democratic elections.

Unfettered access to the full range of media sources and opinions is essential for voters to make informed choices and for the free exchange of information vital to the development of a free and vibrant democratic society.

As one of the principal donors to this project, the United States calls upon the Government of Kyrgyzstan to restore electrical power immediately to the printing press facility and to permit Radio Liberty broadcasts at their previous capacity. Such actions, taken promptly in advance of the March 13 run-off contest, will provide voters with access to the full range of opinions they need to make informed decisions about their future and will contribute to democratic elections.

It will also serve to demonstrate Kyrgyzstan's commitment to a future in which freedom of expression and an independent media occupy central roles.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.